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ABSTRACT

A history teacher in a girls independent high school set out to examine her own teaching process in order to revitalize her work and to understand more about how her students learn. She began to keep a journal of her observations of classroom work and, with the help of a colleague, to analyze the observations. In addition, she set aside class time for students to keep journals that reflected both historical topics and classroom understanding. Through reflecting on her own experiences and those of the students, the teacher sought better to understand how her values affected her teaching, the work environment that fostered or impeded growth, the ways that students constructed knowledge, and the methods that best enabled students to build meaning. The results of the experience of teacher reflection invigorated her teaching, motivated her to develop innovative lessons to reach students, made her more aware of how feelings affect intellectual growth, increased her respect for her students, helped her recognize her own limitations with regard to involvement in time-consuming extra-curricular activities, and gave her a technique for future inquiry into questions relating to improvement of her own teaching. (IAH)

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A Teacher Looks at her Classroom:
Ownership, Consciousness, and Collaboration

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Teachers at Crossroads: Negotiating the Path Through
Collaborative Narrative Inquiry
1992 AERA Annual Meeting

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"I like you. I like the class. But I hate history!" This chance remark by a student set my head swimming: what hadn't I done to make the discipline come alive for this and other students? After five years of teaching freshman history in an independent all-girls school, I felt I was at a dead end. My teaching obviously succeeded in providing a warm and nuturing enviroment. The students felt feel to express themselves, sometimes painfully so, but the excitement of the historical process, history as a living, vibrant discipline full of meaning for their lives wasn't realized. Perhaps, though, rather than a dead end, I had reached a turning point in my teaching: instead of blaming "today's apathetic, MTV saturated children," I could look more carefully at the process of my teaching to try to understand more clearly how students learn and how their learning is meaningful for them.

This, in turn, I hoped, would revitalize my work. Just as some students felt history was dead, so I felt, after five years of routine, that my teaching was too rote. I became a teacher in part because I wanted to explore how people learn. While that goal remained important, I felt increasingly bogged down in classroom routine and institutional demands that distracted me from my goal. I also became a teacher for the sheer joy of working with students, of helping them realize their abilities as

competent individuals. How, then, could I regain the sense of wonder so central to teaching and learning?

Ted Sizer, in Horace's Compromise, says, "History, if it is responsibly taught, is perhaps the most difficult subject for most high school students, because it involves the abstraction of time past." (133) How could this abstraction come alive?
I was fortunate not to be alone with my quandary. Diane Wood, my former Director of Studies, was willing to work with me to help me clarify and sort out issues of teaching and learning. I had to confront these issues if I were going to make any progress in understanding how students learn and in devising ways for the classroom to enhance their learning. Together, Diane Wood and I decided that I would keep a journal of my observations of classroom work and we would analyze my observations. With Diane's thoughtful but relentless prodding, I could better understand how my values affected my teaching, the work environment fostered and impeded growth, the ways students constructed knowledge and the methods that best enabled them to build meaning. In order to better understand the students, I decided not to rely only on observable classroom behavior. I made time for them to keep journals in class that examine both historical topics and classroom understanding.

With Diane's help, we made the first and most fundamental discovery about my teaching: what I want for my students I also want for myself. Just as it is vital to create a democratic classroom in which respect for individual endeavor is sacrosant, so within the school community all people, including teachers,

should have the opportunity to develop their potential. My isolation within the school community had to be confronted, and I had to be courageous in both articulating my needs and enlisting help from my colleagues. I knew from experience I was not alone in wanting closer colleagial collaboration, yet the problem was how to transform that need into action. Several years before, Diane Wood and Ginny Koss had organized an inclusive curriculum seminar in which teachers discussed teaching and learning through feminist epistemology. All of the participants felt invigorated by the seminar and our teaching was enhanced. Could we do likewise on a smaller level within our department? While not all of my colleagues felt the same need for collaboration, several did. We began to visit each other's classes and offer comments, to share ideas on topics as well as methodology. But, demands of teaching and the institution severely limited the kind and quality of colleagial interchange necessary for professional growth. We simply did not have the opportunity to discuss our teaching in meaningful ways. Schools can be frustrating places for teachers as well as students.

My growth, then, was more personal and centered on the classroom. During our meetings throughout the year, Diane forced me to acknowledge values I so deeply and personally felt. It was almost confessional for me to openly acknowledge them. Deweyian ideals on the classroom as a microcosm of society permeate my teaching. Not only should the students respect the discipline, the teachers should respect the students as learners. How painful it is to hear a colleague dismiss a student as a

"twit," for example. I recognized that cultural values of democratic exchange and mutual respect underscored my belief that all students are capable of learning and producing high quality work. The class is an opportunity, a setting, to realize the potential of each individual present. No wonder, then, I run what might be termed a "loose" classroom, with no seating plan and plenty of student choice in their projects; the class is also one where the students apply themselves diligently, with clear goals for moving each student to improve her skills and abilities.

High expectations for students also mean incredible demands on both the students and the teacher. Students are not immune to pressure. Because our school year is short, like most private schools, and because we meet nine days in a two-week cycle in order to allow the students to perform community service, teachers have to condense the curriculum. The students have more homework than they might if we had a longer school year. One student plaintively wrote in her journal:

> "I'm so tired of school, every time a project is turned in we get assigned to another one. Also every week we have at least two tests and I'm so sick of doing my homework during my study periods on the day it's due. I can't wait for spring break. Over spring break I'm going to sleep and read unassigned books. Of course I'm also going out, but not very much. I'm going to play violin all day and go on lots of walks."

Not only do teachers have the demands of preparing, assigning and correcting all the tests and projects, we also have to make sure our students learn. We often have to motivate them to work, and this entails connecting with each student. In order

to establish a personal exchange with individual students I am on call each moment while at work, and carry home work every evening and weekend. Work boundaries are blurred, because there is not enough time to live up to high standards in a normal work day. Increasingly in my journal, I found myself voicing frustration over not having enough time to accomplish everything, feeling my personal life was submerged by school.

After one particular hectic day at school, I analyzed what tasks I had accomplished. I was:

1. purchasing agent, finding catalogues and looking up prices for desks;
2. janitor, cleaning the Study Center and marshalling the freshmen to both clean and set up chairs for our guest speaker;
3. caterer, arranging and buying pizza for our Model UN club's send-off lunch before the Model Organization of American States meeting;
4. counselor, talking to students about their problems;
5. banker, arranging refunds from the Model UN croissant sale fundraiser;
6. secretary, running off materials and fighting our awful photocopy machine;
7. and, incidentally, teacher, preparing and teaching my classes.

Not surprisingly, I left school feeling exhausted and resentful at the lack of institutional support. Teachers at a small school are caught in the bind of wanting to offer a rich program to students whose parents pay hefty tuitions and not having enough staff resources to support these endeavors. I know teachers at other more well-endowed schools, however, who confront the same problems when they try to provide meaningful student activities. It is a problem that seem to haunt good teachers, which Sizer described in Horace's Compromise. I wish there were a solution to this problem, for teachers seem not so much to be burned out as simply worn out.

By reflecting on the dilemma of fluid work boundaries, Diane and I questioned how my expectations of good teaching were typical of women. Did I see teaching as an extension of mothering with no end to the demands on time, no limit to what the teacher-mother gives? Why, for instance, are teachers who seem to maintain strict boundaries between work and personal life by putting in only their required eight hours a day considered lazy teachers? Why, at least in my experience of teaching at five different schools, do men more often seem to balance work and personal life with more rigor? Do women teachers see the nuturing, mothering aspect of teaching as paramount? Is it helpful to students to be nutured or are we making students dependent upon us? Can nuturing be an insidious form of control and a source of power for teachers who are relatively powerless? After all, the world is hardly a nuturing place, and if we are preparing students to enter the world, then would they be better served by a school that more closely replicates the real world? I raise these questions because they affect the very nature of teaching and because most teachers are women.

And so I asked the students for their insights. They wrote about interims in their journals, for I was curious how interims affect them. It is school policy to send an interim if a student performs poorly on a test or project. My hunch was that interims communicate between teacher and parents, and they aren't helpful to students. Writing interims can be tedious for the teacher, but because interims are written with care, they are, in essence, a form of nuturing. I asked the students to reflect whether

interims helped them perform better and if not, to discuss what motivated them to work more effectively. Not surprisingly, the group who most strongly felt interims were necessary and helpful were girls who had never received them. The vast majority believes interims often cause family problems and the best approach is a teacher's personal interest in the student, in other words, nuturing. One girl, a self-described "veteran" of interims, wrote:

> "I believe that interims are necessary if you have previously failed more than one test, but sending them after one failure is kind of unfair. Somedays you just don't feel up to taking a test and you could even be a reasonably good student, but just having a bad day.
> I don't think that interims are very helpful because being yelled at by my parents doesn't get any message through my head other than 'I hate school' and 'I hate my parents.' Getting a D or F makes me mad and sad enough. I believe the best thing to do would be to discuss things with the teacher and explain as best you can why you failed the test and what you can do the next time for preparing for the test.
> The thing that motivates me the most to learn is when a teacher or my parents congratulate me when I do well, NOT scold me when I do badly. This is especially rewarding when you get praised in subjects that you normally don't have good grades.
> Let's say you had all C's and D's in a subject and then you get an A. If a teacher or parent says, "Great job, I knew you could do it," you feel much better than if a teacher or parent says,"Good, keep it up."
> Overall, I think teachers should spend more time trying to work with the student on a personal basis instead of wasting time on an interim."

What's a teacher to do? This eloquent student presented a real dilemma. Just I as I felt like lowering the gates and saying, "No more nuturing. It is a tough world, so you better get used to it," she convinced me that learning is an intensely personal experience and unless I made that personal connection with her, she would flounder. She is not asking for special

help; she is asking for recognition. Neither she nor the other students said they had to like a teacher to be motivated to learn. They want a personal connection, recognition of their efforts. And that recognition costs the teacher in terms of energy, awareness and time.

Students are aware of the balancing act teachers face in demanding and nuturing. One student explained what motivates her to learn by writing,

> "The teacher has a lot to do with it. If the teacher is challenging, I want to do well. When teachers are a little tough and you know it's hard to get praise from them, then that's when you work extra hard to do well and get praise. But teachers shouldn't be too tough, because then you feel like everything you do is not ever going to be good enough..."

Furthermore, as I struggled with the problem of fluid work boundaries, the dichotomy between public and private surfaced again and again. Constantly I wrestled with keeping my private self separate from work. And always a student would barge in and force me into a public realm. For instance, one student in the club I moderate chose to work out her emotional problems in the club. Her needs were immediate and real. They transcended and affected her academic work. How much simplier life would be if I could just walk in and teach history. Instead, I found myself on the telephone with her mother, calling the guidance counselor, seeing the Dean of Students on days when I had a set aside my free periods to correct papers. The papers had to be corrected on the weekend, meaning I had less time with my family. I felt bitter about this intrusion. Then my journal became my solace, as I tried to sort out feelings and reactions to my work, the students and the school at large.

A journal by itself is a harmless way to vent frustrations, but without Diane's probing questions, without her demanding I look deeper at my writing, I question how much growth the journal alone would give me. At her insistence, I analyzed the "why" behind my reactions when I felt cornered by events at school, or when I dismissed students or colleagues as "spoiled." What did I mean and why did I choose that derogatory word? "Spoiled" is not typical of my lexicon. By and large, my journal entries were analytical and the words measured. On one level, the word was symptomatic of exhaustion; on another level, it bespoke my frustration with fluid work boundaries and different values. At times my students weren't as committed to learning history as I wanted them to be.

Conscious of the difference and aware of my own feelings, I was able to recognize similar frustrations with colleagues. On a walk with a teacher, she discussed a student and sadly talked of her disappointment. Beth could be the shining star in art history; instead, she has chosen to do the minimum required. Since the teacher loves her subject, she needs students to share her delight, otherwise the isolation is too great and her teaching too lonely. No wonder she is disappointed. So much of the teacher's identity revolves around her teaching, yet the classroom can be as cold and isolating for teachers as it can be warm and nuturing for students. If teachers had a forum to discuss these issues, we might not so readily dismiss students as "spoiled," we might set more reasonable expectations for students and we might support each other in better fashion.

I wanted to separate my work life and personal life, and to have my work life rational and intellectual, something orderly I could control. My personal life is so emotionally rich that when I returned to teaching six years ago, I wanted to put some distance between my emotional life and my intellectual self. Through reflection and journal writing, I realized that I could not come to grips with my students' emotional needs in the class and as part of their learning unless I understood my own emotional needs better. Letting myself become more emotionally open is dangerous, though. One day at our school's daily assembly I read the opening prayer. It was about how cherished yet neglected children are, and I introduced the prayer with a list of tragedies affecting the children in Washington, D.C. As I read the prayer, I began to weep. The students were absolutely still as I struggled through the reading. Fortunately, I managed to finish the prayer, and the students were very respectful. For that, I felt very grateful. I thought I would feel tremendously embarrassed, but oddly enough, I didn't. Later that day students and faculty told me how moved they were with the prayer!

As I became more comfortable with expressing my emotional needs, I started encouraging the students to be more expressive. After studying India, I asked them to write a comparison of either Hinduism or Buddhism with their religion. One student wrote a very angry entry comparing the oppression of women in Hinduism and Catholicism. After seeing the film "Small Happiness," which was about women in rural China, students wrote thoughtful essays, comparing their lives with those of the women

depicted. They moved beyond the toting up of differences in material goods and concentrated on family ties. During the unit on ancient Greece, they imagined how their lives would be different or similar in ancient Greece. One girl wrote:

> "If I lived in ancient Greece, my life would definitely be different. I would have different values because I would be growing up in a different society. My social life would probably be more controlled by my parents, I would probably have more family ties. I wouldn't be as smart as all of us are today, because I wouldn't go to school. I would probably be learning a craft or trade from my mother or another older woman of the community. My life would be the same in many ways, too, though. I would probably still fight with my siblings and not get along with my parents. Even if I was in Ancient Greece a lot of teenagers go thru the same problems no matter where they live or in what time period they are in."

Another girl concluded her entry by writing, "I think that my family life would be different. My brother would have been killed when he was born (because he has spina bifida). My mother obviously wouldn't be an executive at Marriott. And my parents probably would still be together."

Neither of these students find school particularly easy; they struggle with the work. Yet they integrate their own empathic experiences into the abstraction of ancient Greece, the kind of learning Belenky, et al., refer to as "connected knowing."

By encouraging feelings in the classroom, I found history became less abstract. I also found the students more involved and less prone to neighborly chatting, because their emotional needs were acknowledged in the classroom. My biggest obstacle was time. It takes time to plan debates, role plays and writing

assignments that draw upon students' emotional and intellectual strengths.

Once Diane started asking me questions, I starting asking my students questions. No longer did I make assumptions as to their reactions or expectations. I was able to put into effect those democratic ideals I espoused but seemed to neglect in my quest to cover the curriculum. For instance, my senior class got off to a very shaky start. It was obvious the students and I had different expectations for the class, and we were increasingly frustrated with each other. The line had been drawn with students on one side and teacher on the other. I asked them to fill out a survey in which they answered questions about what they wanted from the course, how much work they were honestly willing to do, how they judged their reading, writing and speaking skills and what they felt they needed to prepare for college. Their answers were gratifyingly direct. They recognized their weaknesses and strengths, and they were fearful of leaving the warm cocoon of high school ill-prepared. Slowly and imperfectly, we -- and it has truly been a collaborative effort with this class -- have made the learning theirs. Not only have their skills improved and their confidence as learners increased, but they are building on their learning and integrating their knowledge with new material. In short, they are beginning to construct knowledge.

At the beginning of the year, the first question posed to the freshman students was to relate their most meaningful experience in learning history. Some students had none; one

described family visits to relatives in Chile, comparing cultures rather than history. A few students bitterly described hours they felt wasted by autocratic teachers who ignored them and concentrated on the textbook. One girl heaped scorn on a teacher who just let them pass notes in class. Sadly, this was her view of "history." Other students discussed visits to living history exhibits, trips to Williamsburg, Virginia, for example, where they felt connected to people in times past. The bulk of the students wrote about meaningful work, projects that took them hours to do but gave them great satisfaction because they felt in control. "It was my work and it was great," was the feeling ringing through their entries.

Clearly, these are people who aren't afraid of work. They received great pleasure from work they created. They longed for the feeling of success and accomplishment. As much as they might detail their anxieties about their abilities, they welcomed the opportunities to do what they believed meaningful. And history had meaning when it became theirs. They were eloquent in their praise for teachers who took the time to push them toward meaning. History came alive when it became part of their immediate experience. One girl, because of a long-term project in history, truly believes she is part of the African country of Gabon.

From the students' responses, it was obvious they are not asking for easier work. They want to be challenged, pushed and prodded if they believe their efforts are respected and acknowledged. These students are not lazy, nor are they bored.

Rather than dismiss them as incapable of serious thought, the school needs to encourage them to undertake serious work. I wondered to myself as I read their responses how true this is of students throughout the country.

Their need to experience history in order to understand it, whether in projects that engage them physically as well as mentally or going to living history exhibitions, became clearer to me when I took the Model UN club to The Hague International Model UN. I had taught world history for six years, but I hadn't been to Europe in fifteen years. In The Hague, I loved wandering around, examining the architecture, standing in the very spot where the De Witt brothers were lynched in 1672, going to Leiden to see the university chartered by William the Silent, going to the Frans Hals Museum and looking at his paintings of the regents of The Old Men's House, then discovering to my delight that the museum is housed in the very same Old Men's House. During my stay, I read Schama's history of the Dutch Golden Age, The Embarrassment of Riches, and being there made the book sing.

For a history teacher, I need to go where the history was made. I realized how much I'd missed in the six years I've taught European history by not spending any time in Europe. Perhaps one reason history becomes a dry and dusty abstraction for students reflects the need for the teacher to become refreshed and restored in her discipline. I returned to the classroom with greater enthusiasm for history. I came back a better teacher, more able to articulate values, better grounded in ideas.

Then I thought about my fourteen-year-old students who need everything concrete and real. How much more would they benefit from a good study tour than reading a history textbook that reduces the narrative sweep of human experience to almost algebraic formulas? But a study tour is impractical, beyond the scope of the institution. Instead, the classroom can serve as a laboratory for experiments in history. This year I used many more primary sources with the freshmen, then had them personalize the readings by writing letters or satires. For instance, after reading the "Constitution of Lacedaemonians," they wrote their own constitutions on subjects of their choice. One girl wrote a "Constitution on Dating," in which she listed and analyzed all the rules for a good date. Another wrote regulations for parents driving their children and friends. Chief rule: parents should never talk in the car.

When we studied the introduction of Christianity in the Roman Empire, I wanted them to understand why the new religion threatened the Roman establishment. So we read a primary source account on rumors of terrible Christian practices. Christians were accused of sacrificing babies and drinking their blood. The author was whipping up hysteria over Christians and doing so out of ignorance. Using that document, the students tried a Christian for her crimes. Finally, we discussed how and why Christianity would get such a suspicious reputation and why so many gruesome rumors were spread about it. We compared the misinformation about Christians to misinformation spread today about groups the majority considers suspect.

Primary sources tend to be difficult to read and understand. Most fourteen-year-olds have difficulty reading with an arched eyebrow, reading below the surface to understand the author's intent; they are trying too hard to comprehend the words. They reflected on the benefit of primary sources in their journals. One student wrote:

> "I enjoy reading primary sources because they tend to be filled with feeling and emotion. They express feelings of the time. They tell of poverty, wealth, famine, birth or death, luck or circumstances. They tell of romances, or loss of romances of the time. They tell about different customs, cultural values and ranks of society. They give the big picture from a biased point of view, it is more like a story than a history textbook has the capability to be."

Another student suggested,

> "One can often gather the emotions and feelings of people, such as Antigone. Other works, for example that of Eihard, give the reader a clear and in-depth view of the lives of people and historical events. In short, primary sources are the most direct and clearly stated accounts of the past."

While this student and several others felt the value of primary sources rested in offering a straight-forward view of the past, most students who enjoyed primary sources found their chief value lay in giving an emotional texture to history. As one student said,

> "When I read a primary source it leads me to a closer feeling of the time. It helps me relate to the feelings of the people during that time. It makes me feel like I have more information and details about the subject before I form an opinion or choice."

These thoughtful comments were all made by average students. While students enjoyed the emotional richness provided by primary

sources, they by and large understood that primary sources represented a particular point of view. As one student analyzed:

> "Using primary sources like Einhard and Antigone does deepen your understanding of historical events. Since the authors are truly interested and devoted to these sources, they would make them extremely rich with historical information. These authors present these facts in a way that would help the reader see their views. However, these sources are usually opinionated and will probably only have facts that strengthen the authors' views. For example, Einhard wrote only good things about Charlemagne and ignored the fact that Charlemagne had a brutal side. Reading primary sources will help you understand clearly one point of view of history. But you need to read another point of view on the same part of history to help you see the different views of a historical event or figure."

This very capable fourteen year old student was able to integrate learning from class, the textbook and primary sources. This is sophisticated learning, and it also involves a personal connection with the material, one that is most clearly obtained in classroom discussion and group work. What transcends their analysis of primary sources is their belief that history when meaningful is personal, real and concrete. One girl described her problem with mathematics in a similar fashion:

> "I like arguing when I think I'm right and I think that's probably good since being able to defend your position and being open to what others have to say at the same time is a good way to learn more about something. I am motivated by words and not by numbers. One of the reasons that I'm so awful in math is because I can't talk about it, debate it or explain it. Discussion, for me, is definitely a motivation to learn."

For her, group problem-solving in a cooperative learning setting is the only way to bridge her need to talk about what she is learning. Other students need to compare the past with today's reality. One student said she most preferred learning about ancient Greek philosophers and scientists,

> "I liked this period best because it linked into today's world through the analogy of computer people, astronomers, astronauts and neurologists. They're in the same positions by not knowing the future and exploring new tangents in society. They are the leaders of our new groups, that will lead us into our future and aid us through our unexplored future."

For another student, making comparisons was not enough. To be meaningful, history had to be part of her experience. She wanted to empathize with historical figures. As she writes,

> "The struggle for power between kings and popes really excites my imagination. I can imagine the two of them, especially Henry and Gregory, battling and gaining allies. I like to think what was going on in Henry's mind as he was excommunicated and as he gave up his pride to stand in the snow to beg for forgiveness."

Sometimes, this personal connection between the historical past and the students' present is very painful. One student wrote about her experience as a Japanese learning about World War Two in an American school.

> "It felt so strange learning things like that in class because I'm Japanese and my friends who sit next to me, around me, are Americans. I felt like fighting with my friend. That is my first time I felt strange in History class."

Without the journal, this child would have struggled alone with her feelings. The journal afforded us the opportunity for dialogue. We discuss issues back and forth; the journals are a means of conversation. Because they share their feelings, I can lead class discussion with greater sensitivity.

With their insights and suggestions, I was able to provide them with classroom activites and readings that stimulated their need to make their learning personal. Again, I realized the students also need what I need for myself: deeper stimulation in the discipline of history. My trip to The Hague made reading a

history of the Dutch Golden Age more alive, and, while I could not offer that experience to the students, we could, as a group, try to replicate it in the classroom.

Another issue that surfaced in both my journal and the students' journals was the relationship between routine and variety and the struggle to find a balance between the two. Students want routine; they want to know what is expected. They like having the tests written in the same format, so they can sit down and start writing. After I returned from my trip, I asked the students to compare the experience of having a substitute teacher with their regular teacher. The clearest difference for them was that of routine and expectations. One student wrote:

> "I like substitutes, but they take quite a while to adjust to. One reason I like this course so much is because we have a traditional way of doing things. We usually study each chapter the same way. I like doing this much better, because I know what to expect, but but when a sub comes and things change for a week, I don't like it very much."

Another student echoed her thoughts by writing,

> "Regular teachers are good because they always have a set plan and a regular schedule. Subs are nice once in a while so you can have a break from the teacher, but it gets annoying when they don't know what they are supposed to do."

This student demands clear expectations and competence from her teachers. She also wants variety. At the end of the first semester, I asked the students what activities they liked best. They enjoyed games like "It's Academic" as review for tests, and they liked participatory activities, such as role plays and debates. They believe movies, even just brief sections as I tend to show them, were helpful as well as entertaining. But they

also liked knowing they always had to do the section questions in each chapter. They wanted a test at the end of each chapter. They wanted clear and consistent expectations.

I also feel the tension between routine and variety. After teaching freshman world history for five years, I felt I needed a change. Yet I couldn't teach a different course. The chief way I found variety was through my and my students' journals. Since I better understood how they were responding to the material and what motivated them, I could examine and adjust classroom activities. The class became not just a course in world history, but, in a sense, a laboratory experiment in how students construct knowledge. This, in turn, reaffirmed my original motivation for entering teaching, namely, understanding how people learn. Through the experience of travelling to the Netherlands, I realized the need for greater simulation in my discipline. Consequently, I participated in several history workshops. Without conscious reflection and Diane's insistence that I examine my writing for meaning, I question whether I would have taken these positive steps for professional growth. Without renewal in the discipline a teacher's love and commitment for her subject withers.

By offering students choices and implementing their ideas, I did not abrogate my responsibility in the classroom. Rather, I became more careful about their understanding of the need to do things that are tedious and difficult. They, for instance, dislike outlining, but after several outlining assignments, most understood how outlining forced them to separate a major idea

from a supporting detail. They could see the value in that. They fought outlining, but they conceded it helped them read with greater comprehension.

After their first analytical essay, I asked them to evaluate the assignment. Most everyone found it very difficult. Some students felt we hadn't discussed the assignment carefully enough in class; one, in particular, suggested spending a period writing the essay outline in class, so I could help them with immediate problems. One student wrote,

> "Writing the analytical essay outline was a first time experience and I had a difficult time writing it. The book I choose was difficult to read, which added on to the difficulty. Now, though, I have a better understanding of how to write another analytical essay outline, and I believe that having the outline will help me greatly when I write the actual essay. Writing the outline took longer than I had expected. I think next time I will take more and better notes as I read, which will probably help me next time I write an analytical essay."

Not all students agreed. One girl's reaction to writing the outline for the analytical essay was angry. She said,

> "I hated it! Personally, I detest outlines like that, but I can see the wisdom in constructing them before I write an essay. The one thing I really detest about them is the 'correct form' required and the bibliographical citation. I really hate grammar and, for me, outlines that are supposed to be grammatically correct fall in that category..."

The fact that she can "see the wisdom" in doing something tedious attests to her growth as a student. Just as students want to be challenged and want the routine varied yet stable, so they want their ideas and thoughts to be respected. Being able to write about her frustrations with outlines doesn't mean she likes writing them. She continues to balk at what she considers

authoritarian structures, such as grammatically correct outlines, but because she is recognized, she is able to empathize with the curriculum: she acknowledges the value of doing something she detests.

Empathy developed between the students and me during the process of writing and reading their journals. They told me what they thought of the class: they encouraged me with thoughtful suggestions; they shared their reactions to subject matter so I could better understand how they learn; and they told me what was important to them. I always allowed them a free choice entry, and often they would write about intimate things: homecoming, a new horse, major arts competition, or frustrations with parents and friends.

This greater empathy led to increased flexibility. I started asking them questions, checking their reactions and either making changes or feeling more resolved in the direction we were headed. For instance, I read in a handbook on journals that the teacher should never correct students' spelling. I thought this was odd, after all, wasn't that a role of the teacher? So I asked the students if they would feel bad if I corrected their spelling. They were amazed with the question, and remained so after we discussed possible negative effects on their writing. The poor spellers in the class said they wanted to learn to spell. One student wanted to know if I would grade down on spelling. When I assured her corrections were part of her learning and not her grade, she asked to be corrected.

One day I began the class by saying, "We have a test in two days. Tomorrow we'll review. This is what we need to accomplish

today." Then I gave them several methods to achieve our daily goal, and allowed them to choose. They were delighted with the choice, and the whole process took just a few minutes. Some days, they are so tired or distracted with work in other classes or sports try-outs they don't want to choose; they want me to direct them. I can sympathize with them. I can recall countless faculty meetings where I have arrived exhausted and groaned at the idea of small group discussion which would demand me to perform when I preferred to listen.

I am also able to change a class midstream, because I have a better feel for the rhythm of the class. I'll even say, "I don't think this is working. Let's try something else." I have always admitted doubts and lack of knowledge, and even made it a point to say, "I don't know. Let's look it up." I believe it is important for students to model teacher's behavior and to avoid being dependent upon the teacher as the only source of knowledge. I also like to encourage speculative thought, "Why do you suppose the textbook refers to these Muslims traders as 'pirates'?" With speculative thought one can't always have all the answers.

Now, I feel increasingly at ease to solicit their ideas and to explain my reasons for doing certain things. In one sense, the class is less authoritarian, because the students feel free to express themselves. In another sense, though, I have more control in my classes than I ever have. We know the process is not completely democratic, but they are an integral part of it. Granted, the composition of the class makes this easier. The students are all girls, by and large from educated, middle class

families with parents who have strong aspirations for their children. While they are a racially and religiously diverse class, their values are fairly uniform.

This year, I have only two serious discipline problems. I use the journal to try to understand and work out my reactions to them and to strategize ways to help them. I found myself comparing the two students, and being more comfortable with the one I perceived as more like me. I wrote,

> "Now that I re-read this entry, I'm struck by how the girl I think is unsure is probably very different from me. She reacts at an immediate, viseral and emotional level to the issues raised by Sophocles.
> The girl I think is brimming with self-respect, on the other hand, clearly thinks more the way I do. In her essay on Antigone, she distinguishes between the spirit and the letter of the law. She's analytical, abstract. Her example is how she stays in her room when punished by her parents, but will leave to get something to eat if she's hungry. Again, she establishes another hierarchy.
> What, then, does this say about my ability to effectively diagnose students? Do I conclude those who think like me are strong and healthy and those who approach the world differently are weak and unsure?"

The journal gave me a forum to mull over my reactions to students, to try to be more honest in my dealings with them and to treat them with greater fairness. But without Diane prodding me, questioning my reactions and encouraging my growth, the journal may have become a way to feel more secure in my prejudices. While I can attest to how important teacher reflection in the classroom is, I found it more helpful when pushed to look beyond the surface. The journal took on the same function as it had for my students. It became a means for communication, a way to discuss and think through important

issues. Just as my students were aware of writing for their teacher, I knew Diane would thoughtfully read my entries. And for both the students and me, that knowledge did not cause us to censure our entries, rather, we spilled out our angst, secure in the belief that a loving, caring person would read our writing with sensitivity and insight.

How, then, has this experience of teacher reflection changed me? My teaching is invigorated. I am more interested in innovative lessons that really reach the students in meaningful ways. I am more open to feelings in the classroom and better understand how the world of feelings is a vital part of intellectual growth. I have more respect for my students. Throughout the year, they offered intellectual insight, incisive wit, respect for work and generosity of spirit; they are truly people with whom I am proud to work.

I also better understand my limits. I see more clearly that the extra jobs of school distract me from teaching. I resigned from moderating the Model UN club, something I did with deep misgivings, because I believe that experience is an important vehicle for teaching citizenship. It simply required too much outside time that drew me away from my classes and robbed me of time with my family. I also resigned as department liaison, hoping to lighten the administrative burdens of teaching.

Energy is re-directed. The problem of teacher isolation is a serious one. I am writing for a grant for a seminar for teachers on "The Images of Teachers in Literature and Art." That could be a useful way for us to discuss our work in a way that promotes personal and professional growth.

Finally, I realize I have more questions than answers. The questions of how people learn, what motivates and deepens learning and what is the most effective way to teach a group of people are more important to me than ever. I now have a method for investigating those questions, and I believe students are eager to help me become a better teacher. Other questions remain: fluid work boundaries, intrusions on a teacher's personal life, impossible job descriptions, and nuturing versus tough-love teaching.

Because of the complexities of both students and classrooms, in a sense, teachers need to be all things to all people, an impossible task. Perhaps, just as students need variety underscored by consistency in a classroom, they need teachers who offer different strengths at different times. The story of Esther illustrates this point. My friend Esther, a sociology professor, has made the long journey out of poverty. Her father, brother and sister all died during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in World War Two. Her mother's health was broken, and Esther's chief problem as a child was losing her hair because of malnutrition. Her seventh grade teacher was sensitive and loving. She showered Esther with encouragement and praise, and made Esther feel, for the first time, that she was a bright and capable girl. Esther's eighth grade teacher was the antithesis; she was tough and demanding. She drilled Esther relentlessly, marched her to an excellent high school, made her take the entrance exam, and saw to it that Esther received a scholarship. Esther needed both of these teachers. Without the love, the discipline might have swamped her. Without the discipline, the

love might not have propelled her out of the tenement. Despite their different personalities and teaching styles, both teachers were absolutely committed to her. They recognized her gifts, and they believed in her.

Most students don't have the luxury of having two influential teachers. If we teachers are committed to transforming young lives, to offering hope where often there seems to be none, to helping students learn to believe in themselves, the best way to begin is with ourselves. By listening to our voices, by gleaning understanding from what is said and what is left unsaid, by opening ourselves to our students and making them collaborators in their learning, we can renew our professional commitments and grow as educators.

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